

Immigrants overcome great odds to raise children in foreign lands, say researchers

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A recent surge in immigration rates has led psychologists to study how these families are coping and thriving in their adopted countries. In a special June issue of the *Journal of Family Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association, researchers report that close family ties are crucial for immigrants' successful transition to their new country.

"The articles in this issue examine the psychological experiences of a diverse set of immigrant families and their children who arrive in North America, Europe and Israel from many corners of the world," said Susan S. Chuang, PhD, of the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. Chuang wrote the Introduction to the special issue, along with Uwe Gielen of Saint Francis College. "This research helps us to better understand the profound impact the immigration experience has on family relationships."

Recent census data show that the number of immigrant children in the United States is growing rapidly. They account for approximately 20 percent of the child population, and that number is expected to increase to 30 percent by the year 2015. Asians are one of the fastest-growing ethnic minority groups in the United States, and several of the issue's articles focused on these families and their struggles.

This recent surge in immigration rates means more and more families are finding themselves struggling to adapt to new countries and cultures. These families and their children face a host of challenges, including

discrimination, isolation and financial stresses, say psychologists who contributed to this special issue.

One study examined the impact of family financial stresses on the academic achievement of Chinese-American adolescents. Most of the parents in this study of 444 families had emigrated to the United States from China. The authors found that the teenagers who were more aware of their families' economic woes were more likely to suffer depressive symptoms, especially older adolescents, and did worse in school than those who were not as affected by money problems.

A study found Chinese immigrant mothers of preschoolers were more likely to engage in high levels of authoritative parenting practices. Authoritative parenting involves developing a close, nurturing relationship with children while also maintaining a reasonably high level of expectations and guidelines. The findings showed an authoritative parenting style led to fewer behavior problems among the children in the study. The researchers point out that overall, Chinese parents are more accepting of authoritative parenting practices than previously thought.

Another longitudinal study determined that, within couples, Chinese-American parents were more consistent in their parenting messages to their children than were white American parents. White American parents were more accepting of their children's behavior, perhaps in an effort to build up their children's self-esteem. Chinese-American parents' greater control of their children's behavior was linked to fewer behavior problems.

One article also looked at how family obligations affected the mental health of hundreds of Chinese-American high school students in the San Francisco area. Students who were born in China felt more family obligation than students who were born in the United States. But, those who endorsed greater family obligation were less likely to suffer from

symptoms of depression, the researchers found.

"These findings highlight the important role of family obligation to Chinese-American adolescents' mental health," wrote the study's lead author Linda Juang, PhD, of San Francisco State University.

Chuang, one of the special issue's editors, said the issue's other articles provide a unique glimpse of immigrant families from countries such as Russia and parts of Africa, who have arrived in other Western countries including Canada, Germany, Israel, Portugal, and the Netherlands. "Only by studying immigrant families and children across a broad range of societies can we accurately evaluate the research on immigrants to the [United States](#)," she said.

More information: "Understanding Immigrant Families From Around the World: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 3.

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